ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, FONSI AND DECISION RECORD

BLM, Bishop Field Office
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100
Bishop, CA 93514

EA Number: DOI-BLM-CAC-170-2011-0001-EA

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: CACA 046216 (Amendment)

Proposed Action Title/Type: Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD) Air Monitoring Sites

Location of Proposed Action:

MDM, California, T. 16 S., R. 37 E.,
Section 24, SW1/4SW1/4SE1/4;
Section 25, NE1/4NE1/4NW1/4,
NW1/4NW1/4NE1/4;
T. 16 S., R. 38 E.,
Section 31, SW1/4NW1/4SE1/4.

Applicant (if any): Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District (GBUAPCD)

Plan Conformance:

The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved March 25 1993. The 1993 Bishop RMP states under General Policies on Page 8, No.1; "Management will be on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield as per Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) section 102 (a)(7)."

Under the idea of multiple-use and sustained yield, the BLM is also authorized under FLPMA section 501(a)(1-7) to grant Rights-of-Way (ROW) and amendments to ROWs for such uses as pipelines, roads, power lines, wells, and other facilities on the public lands for the public good.

The proposed action would be the use of public land for wind and sand monitoring sites by amending an existing right-of-way issued for the same purpose. The Bishop RMP does not prohibit against such use. The proposed action has been reviewed and is in conformance with the plan.

Need for Proposed Action:

The LADWP is mitigating dust emissions from the Owens Lake through the Owens Lake Dust Mitigation Project. GBUAPCD has been monitoring the lake air quality for the last decade in order to establish a base line for air quality in the basin. Seventeen air

monitoring sites are being operated on public land under an existing right-of-way (ROW) CACA 046216. Now that the mitigation project is close to completion, additional sites are needed to enhance the data gathering for those areas currently lacking monitoring sites. There are currently 187 wind and sand monitoring sites located on the Owens Lake bed. The six proposed sites on public land are intended for that purpose.

Description of Proposed Action:

The proposed action would be the installation of six (6) sand flux monitoring sites consisting of a Sensit (electronic sand motion sensor), data logger, solar panel, radio antenna, and a Cox Sand Catcher (CSC). The data logger, solar panel, radio antenna would be mounted on a 4 foot steel pole. The CSC is located at ground level. The Sensit is mounted on a 3 foot steel pole. The site installation would take about 4-5 days and would take place in October, 2010. Access would be on existing dirt roads and then all equipment would be hand carried to each site. No off road driving would take place. No vegetation would be removed or damaged. No vegetation rehab would be needed. See Exhibit 1.

Affected Environment/Environmental Impacts:

The proposed action is not within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, nor Wild and Scenic River corridor, and there would be no effects on any lands so designated.

The proposed action is within the Owens Valley federal nonattainment area. The. EPA's General Conformity requirements are; that emissions are below 70 tons per year and less than 10% of a non-attainment or maintenance area's total emissions for that pollutant, which is, 29,408 tons per year for the Owens Valley non-attainment area. Other than driving on existing dirt roads during the 4-5 days of the project, no other surface disturbing activity would take place. The action would result in the emission of PM_{10} during installation but the extremely small amount (estimated at <5 lbs per year) is well within the standard. Air quality would not be affected.

There would be no impacts to prime farm lands, flood plains, nor water quality (including ground or surface waters).

Affected Environment and Impacts for Wildlife, Vegetation (updated 11-30-10), VRM, and Community/Tribal resources were taken from EA CA-170-08-58 dated September 8, 2008. The 2008 EA was developed for the same proposal in the same area.

Cultural resources

A cultural inventory was conducted by the Bishop FO archaeologist on July 28, 2010. No cultural resources were found at any of the proposed sites.

Visual resources

The Visual Resource Management (VRM) for the area is Class III. VRM Class III is defined as, “Contrasts to the basic elements caused by a management activity may be evident and begin to attract attention in the characteristic landscape. However, the changes should remain subordinate to the existing characteristic landscape.”

The characteristic landscape is above the old Owens Lake lakeshore and is a gently sloping alluvial fan. The fan has a fine to medium texture surface with tan color and desert shrubs. The 2-3’ high shrubs tend to be grey with green canopies.

For the proposed sites, the Key Observation Point (KOP), where the project view is most sensitive, is along Hwy 136 which is a well-used travel corridor between Lone Pine and Death Valley. The speed limit on this road is 65 mph. The proposed sites are located from 400 feet to 2,000 feet from the highway. Some of the proposed sites are also 40 feet below the grade of the highway. It is expected that the low 4 foot height of the equipment and the sight distance of at least 400 feet would make the sites nearly invisible to the traveling public. The sites meet VRM Class III.

Vegetation

The proposed sites are within desert saltbrush scrub and dune vegetation community types. The desert saltbrush scrub type is dominated by allscale (*Atriplex polycarpa*), shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*), and burro-bush (*Ambrosia dumosa*). This vegetation type is well represented throughout the Owens Lake basin. The dune complexes (Keeler Dune area) are dominated by greasewood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus*) and have low densities of vegetation. The dune complexes contain suitable habitat for California Native Plant Society List 2 plant species Nevada Orytctes (*Oryctes nevadensis*). BLM does not offer special protection of this species. *Oryctes nevadensis* is an annual species that appears infrequently in sandy sites on the east side of the Owens Valley following high winter and spring precipitation events. Growth and flowering occurs between April and early May. No surveys were conducted at these locations because of the timing of this proposal came in well past the peak phenological stage of this species. No impact to *Oryctes nevadensis* is anticipated however due to the small size of the Cox Sand Catcher (CSC) which is data logger, solar panel, radio antenna mounted on a 4 foot steel pole. In addition, the low impact equipment installation method of limited surface disturbance, no off-road access and no removal of vegetation would further afford protection to any extant seed bank of *Oryctes nevadensis*. There are no other known threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species or potential habitats that would be impacted by the proposed action.

Invasive, non-native species

There are no known non-native species occurring in the proposed action area. There would be a potential that weed seeds attached to the vehicles could be dislodged and end up on the ground leading to an invasive species infestation.

Wildlife habitat

The proposed action area is habitat for various reptiles, vertebrate and invertebrate species, such as, lizards, rabbits, rodents, and insects. Rodent or reptile burrows in bare ground or under desert shrubs might be temporarily displaced during installation. Due to the limited amount of surface disturbance at these sites, there would be no impact to these species or habitats.

The proposed sites are near potential nest sites (0.5 mile west of site) for Western Snowy Plover (unvegetated gravel ridges and low-density salt grass) which are known to breed in the general area. These ground-nesting birds and their nests and eggs are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The breeding season varies with climatic conditions but potentially extends from March through July. Since construction would take place in October and outside of the breeding season, there would be no impact to the Western Snowy Plover. In addition, dune vegetation may provide habitat for BLM Species of Concern dune weevils (Trigonoscuta spp). Since there would be no vegetation disturbance, there would be no impact to this species.

Minerals

There are no known mining claims or material sites the proposed action areas.

Impacts to Community or Tribe

There would be a slight positive impact to the local community or Tribes. The monitoring station and camera in conjunction with the numerous air monitoring stations located in the Owens Lake basin would help in providing air quality data for the dust mitigation project and may identify additional areas where mitigation is needed. This project is already improving air quality near the local communities and the local Tribes.

The Lone Pine Native American tribe located 10 miles to the northwest is concerned about the general area due to the previous discovery of cultural resources in the Keeler Dunes. In July, 2008 a field exam was conducted with the Lone Pine Tribe in order to present the original sand monitoring proposal and gather tribal concerns for the proposed action. The Tribe indicated that the minimal surface disturbing impact of the proposed action would not cause concern. The cultural inventory did not locate any cultural resources.

Environmental Justice

There will be no disproportionate impacts to low income or minority groups, per Executive Order 12898 (2/11/94). There are no known local groups or low income groups that use the proposed action area. See *Impacts to Community or Tribe* section.

Hazardous Materials

There would be no hazardous materials associated with the proposed project.

Cumulative effects

The Owens Lake currently has 187 monitoring sites typical of the ones proposed. These sites require little surface disturbance or have minimal impact to the surrounding environment. The addition of six monitoring sites would not change that impact.

This project is expected to contribute to knowledge of air quality from enhanced data gathering within the Owens Lake basin. These sites allow GBUAPCD to evaluate the mitigated areas and determine where and if additional dust mitigation is needed, in order to continue improving air quality within the Owens Lake basin and the valley. In addition, there would be no cumulative impact to global warming due to the minimal amount of disturbance and placement of monitoring equipment in the environment.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:

Wash all equipment and vehicles used during the construction to remove weed seeds and any accumulated dirt prior to entering public land.

Utilization of the above mitigation would result in elimination of potential impacts from; invasion of noxious weeds. There would be no residual impacts.

Implementation Monitoring:

None required

Persons/Agencies Consulted: Grace McCarley GBUAPCD,
Preparer(s):

Larry Primosch BLM, Realty Specialist
Greg Haverstock BLM, Archaeologist

Date: October 13, 2010

Reviewed By:_____ **Date:** _____
Environmental Coordinator

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this environmental assessment DOI-BLM-CAC-170-2011-0001-EA including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts. I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required.

There will be no effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the action.

I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the Bishop Resource Management Plan, approved March 25, 1993. This plan has been reviewed, and the proposed action conforms with the land use plans' terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures identified below and amend the existing air monitoring ROW for the additional sites. The mitigation will eliminate any impacts concerning; invasive weeds.

The additional monitoring sites will allow the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District to improve their monitoring capability within the Owens Lake basin and the dust mitigation project.

Mitigation Measures/Remarks:

Wash all equipment used during the construction to remove weed seeds and any accumulated dirt prior to entering public land.

Authorized Official: _____ **Date:** _____
Field Manager, Bishop Field Office